Refugees and Internal Displacement during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939)

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Since the 20th century, forced displacement has become one of the primary social problems stemming from armed conflicts. Population movements caused by war are evidently not a problem that originated in the 20th century, but it was then that they acquired hitherto unseen dimensions, leading to large-scale humanitarian crises in a context in which civilians were increasingly directly targeted by violence.

Thus, forced displacements have been a significant aspect of many wars, and particularly civil wars. While it is true that the term first brings to mind the experience of exile and the need to leave one's country of origin, displacement within a country – especially when its territory has been split in the context of a war – is also commonplace. This type of displacement can be equally traumatic for those who experience it. Whether or not it involves crossing international borders, forced displacement means fleeing one's home in order to save one's life, with all that this entails: leaving the known for the unknown, living with perpetual uncertainty and the constant feeling of not being safe, and leaving nearly everything behind – one's home, belongings, and even loved ones. Displacement has a destabilizing effect on both the place from which people are forced to flee and the place to which they flee, with the latter forced to provide shelter and assistance to large numbers of destitute people. It is important to discuss internal displacement, as the focus on exile accounts for only a fraction of the overall problem. The full scope of life behind the frontlines is considerably more complex.

The Spanish Civil War is a clear example of this complexity. The military uprising of July 1936 left the country divided between those regions where the coup was successful and those which remained loyal to the government of the Second Republic, leading to civil war. From the very beginning, the conflict resulted in continuous population movements. While some involved leaving Spain's borders, most were internal. The repression and indiscriminate violence carried out by rebel troops as they advanced led millions of non-com-

batants to abandon their homes and seek refuge in the Republican rear-guard, embarking on a lengthy exodus, though they initially thought it would last only a few weeks. In the course of the war, further forced displacements occurred, though they took varied forms, from spontaneous flight – particularly during the first months of the conflict – to planned evacuations organized by institutions that were created for this very purpose, one it became clear that the war would not come to a quick end and that the situation of displaced persons was becoming increasingly untenable. Factors such as the proximity of the frontlines were evidently key to determining the timing, scope, and frequency of these movements, particularly in areas near long-lasting fronts, where a large proportion of the population was eventually evacuated to either the Republican or the insurgent rear-guard, as occurred in Aragon.

The conflict took place in a context characterized by the lack of a solid framework in international law for the protection of displaced persons. Such a framework would not emerge until after the Second World War and the foundation of the United Nations, which led to the creation of the International Refugee Organization (IRO). This organisation was succeeded by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the agency still active today. However, it must be noted that, despite the lack of provisions in international law, the Spanish Civil War was a conflict that received considerable attention in the international press, generating headlines in numerous countries. Despite the Non-Intervention Agreement, first-hand information on the course of the war was consistently available abroad, thanks to the large number of foreign correspondents reporting from different parts of Spain – who made the brutal violence committed against civilians known to an international audience – and to the wide variety of humanitarian organisations providing aid on the ground.

It is estimated that millions of people were forced to abandon their homes during the conflict. Counting just internally displaced persons, the most widely accepted figure is around three million, of whom approximately 1,800,000 required institutional assistance and shelter.[1] It must be stressed that it is difficult to determine the exact number, both because sources have been lost and due to the nature of these movements. In many cases, refugees themselves made the decision to flee, and as a result they were not documented. The difficulty in establishing concrete numbers is aggravated by the unpredictable movement of large numbers of individuals. While the exact figures may remain elusive, it is clear than an enormous number of people were forced to leave their homes.

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1 Julio Clavijo Ledesma, *La política sobre la població refugiada durant la Guerra Civil, 1936-1939*, Girona: Universitat de Girona, 2003, pp. 87-88.

Based on currently available data and information, forced displacement was among the most significant social problems faced by the Republican government during the war, due to the obligation to provide assistance and find room for the large number of people who arrived each day in places like Madrid and the need to organize evacuations in the face of shifting frontlines and the threat of air raids. Another major problem was overcrowding in places of arrival, which complicated the provision of supplies and made living together difficult. The problem of displacement affected much of the population living in Republican-controlled territory, either directly or indirectly. In the Republican rear-guard, which continued to shrink as the insurgents made gains, the number of displaced persons eventually amounted to 12% of the total 1936 population. Displacement was also a problem in the insurgent rear-guard, though on a smaller scale. Displaced persons in rebel territory included both refugees who had fled the Republican zone and people who had found shelter in cities that subsequently fell to the insurgents. The rebels were forced to deal with a series of problems that they had not anticipated, such as the large number of orphaned and lost children who needed all manner of assistance and the scarcity of basic supplies, including medical supplies and warm clothing.[2]

The difficulties inherent in assimilating such large numbers should not impede efforts to understand that these were not mere statistics, but rather millions of individual people, each with their own experiences and losses. Displaced persons were victims of the conflict, people who – for various reasons – were forced to flee their homes due to circumstances that put their lives and those of their families at risk. Their departure conditioned life and politics in the rear-guard. It is important to avoid the stereotype that sees displaced persons as mere recipients of aid. Indeed, many women refugees actively participated in support networks in the places where they had found refuge, performing agricultural labour and providing childcare. As for men of military age, upon reaching their destination, they had to enlist in the Republican army.

Flight

In the days that followed the partially successful military uprising, those who were ideologically aligned with the side – insurgent or Republican – that had been defeated in the part of Spain where they lived fled, fearing that they would fall victim to repression and outbreaks of violence due to their political activities and proximity to certain groups.

2 Gabriel Petrus, *La ayuda humanitaria en la Guerra Civil española (1936-1939)*, Granada: Comares Historia, 2015.

Those most closely aligned with right-wing positions and those who supported the uprising largely chose to go into exile, leaving Spain by land – particularly by crossing into Portugal, where they were immediately warmly welcomed, but also by travelling to Gibraltar, France, or Andorra.[3] In coastal areas, people also fled by sea, some travelling to the same countries as those who escaped by land, while others left for more distant destinations, such as Italy or Latin America. This exile of right-wing individuals fleeing areas that had remained loyal to the Republic was largely temporary, as many were able to return to Spain, either quickly reaching rebel territory or, at the very least, returning as soon as the war was over. Those who were able sought shelter in embassies or in nearby regions where the uprising had triumphed from the start. Conversely, people loyal to the Republic who had to flee areas now controlled by the rebels largely stayed within Spain's borders, believing that the uprising would be quashed in a matter of weeks. Some did flee across borders after finding themselves encircled. However, there were also people loyal to the Republic who stayed in their homes, believing they had done no wrong and therefore had no reason to leave, and were subject to the repressive practices of the rebels. As has been noted, at the beginning of the conflict, people fled their homes because they believed they were in danger due to their political activities. However, as news of atrocities committed against civilians in the cities and towns occupied by the fascists began to spread, the population of displaced persons increasingly came to include non-combatant segments of society, particularly women, children, and the elderly.

These early movements were generally not long journeys with a set destination. Rather, people sought refuge in nearby towns, preferably in the homes of relatives, friends, or acquaintances, intending to stay there until the situation became calmer. Travel through the countryside and to destinations far from major transport routes was preferred, in order to avoid controls on major roads. People used the lay of the land to their advantage, crossing natural borders such as rivers and forests, which allowed them to travel outside the routes generally used for the movement of troops. However, this early flight to nearby areas or towns, carrying minimal belongings and taking advantage of natural obstacles or taking refuge in the mountains, soon gave way to the search for refuge in the principal cities of the rear-guard.

This change in the intended destination of the displaced was motivated by the desire to avoid falling victim to the barbaric acts committed by occupying fascist forces: all manner of abuse, the humiliation of women, and the terror instilled by the Moroccan troops

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3 Fábio Alexandre Faria, "Refugiados em Portugal: fronteira e vigilância no tempo da Guerra Civil de Espanha (1936-1939)", in: *Revista Portuguesa de História* 48 (2017), pp. 61-84.

wherever they went. Reports of terror and atrocities appeared in the press, with clearly propagandistic aims, but these stories were also spread by witnesses who had fled occupied zones after seeing them with their own eyes. Thus, the testimony of the first to flee may have motivated subsequence departures. The exact reasons for which people fled their homes varied, but the news coming from occupied zones undoubtedly contributed to creating a generalized climate of fear, along with other factors, such as the threats broadcast by the insurgent general Queipo de Llano over the radio. The displaced provided direct information on the course of the war, and particularly on how it was experienced by civilians at a time when the press favoured largely optimistic accounts that were far-removed from reality, but which focused on cultivating the image of the enemy. Indeed, particularly during the first months of the war, the press used the alleged accounts of displaced persons for propagandistic purposes, claiming that the defeat of the insurgents was imminent and that their troops were demoralized.

The means of escape varied greatly by location and according to each individual's personal circumstances. Some fled on wagons drawn by animals, while others left by automobile or train, if they had the opportunity to do so. Boats were used by some fleeing coastal areas or the Balearic Islands. However, it was most common to flee on foot, often covering long distances without resting for days. Pained at having to leave their homes behind, people took their most valued and useful possessions – especially blankets and warm clothing for winter. In places where people were forced to flee with little to no notice, a wide variety of possessions were left behind, fragments of lives upended by the conflict.[4] Forced displacement had an inevitable psychological impact, as people had to leave everything they knew behind, not knowing what lay ahead even in the first hours following departure. However, it also took a physical toll on the displaced, who had to endure long journeys with nothing to eat but the food they had managed to gather before they left. Adverse weather conditions were a further hardship faced by some, due to the hot summers and cold winters in some of the regions from which the largest numbers of people were forced to flee, in addition to the difficulties inherent in walking for days without rest. These harsh conditions had a significant impact on the health of many, and some were unable to go on and were left behind or perished along the way.

The spontaneous decision to flee was particularly commonplace in the summer of 1936, though it was not limited to this period; rather, it featured, with more or less frequency, throughout the conflict. Perhaps the most impactful and best-remembered example occurred in February 1937, when the city of Málaga fell to the insurgents.

4 A testimony of sudden flee in: Norman Bethune, *Las heridas,* Logroño: Pepitas de calabaza, 2012.

Thousands of people, most of them civilians, attempted to flee *in extremis* along the road to Almería, which followed the coastline, under constant fire from the air and the sea from forces who were well aware that they were targeting civilians, leaving a trail of dead. What happened in Málaga is perhaps even more shocking given that planned evacuations had been a common practice for some time, but in this particular case nothing was done, at least not until it was too late to avoid disaster.[5]

As in Málaga, not all those who fled their homes managed to reach a destination. Some fugitives were caught and forced to return and face retaliatory measures. Furthermore, the commotion and haste that characterized many departures led to a large number of missing children and the separation of families, sometimes for good, though the most fortunate were eventually reunited thanks to the systems put in place to allow communication between refugees in different locations. Moreover, starting in the first weeks of the conflict, the insurgents used deceptive statements in the press, as well the direct intervention of third parties, to convince the relatives of those who had fled to urge them to return, with the false promise that they would face no reprisals. Those who did return faced not only repression but, in most cases, death.

Evacuation

Following an intense summer characterized by massive population movements, this type of flight began to give way to planned evacuations beginning in September 1936, particularly after institutions specifically charged with organizing them were established. This does not mean that no evacuations had taken place over the summer; indeed, there were small-scale movements precipitated by the course of the war, but which cannot be considered spontaneous flight because they were more or less planned and organized by trade unions, political organisations, or existing entities that took on a new purpose, such as the *Consejo Superior de Protección de Menores* (High Council for the Protection of Minors). These groups undertook the task of moving the injured, the disabled and sick, children from preventoriums, and even entire small communities away from areas near the frontlines to safer locations. However, in these first months, there were no administrative entities responsible for overseeing the evacuation of the civilian population.

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5 See Encarnación Barranquero Texeira and Lucía Prieto Borrego, *Población y Guerra Civil en Málaga: Caída, éxodo y refugio*, Málaga: Centro de Ediciones de la Diputación de Málaga, 2007.

It was in late September, as the situation grew increasingly untenable – especially in Madrid – that the need to organize official evacuations to redistribute the displaced population and move people away from war zones began to be discussed. The first committees were constituted for this purpose beginning in early October, organized by the Spanish and Catalan governments. These committees were charged with organizing evacuations and providing assistance to refugees at the central, provincial, and local levels. The history of assistance for displaced persons cannot be separated from the political context of the time and the disputes over responsibilities and jurisdictions within the government. As a result, multiple institutions existed during the war whose roles overlapped or which disappeared when there were changes in the makeup of the government, being replaced by new institutions. For instance, in Catalonia, the provision of supplies and assistance was initially divided between the *Conselleria de Proveïments* (Department of Supplies), controlled by the PSUC (Unified Socialist Party of Catalonia), and the *Conselleria de Sanitat i Assistència Social* (Department of Health and Social Assistance), led by the CNT (National Confederation of Labour). On numerous occasions, tensions between the two organisations over the control of these services meant that they were not properly provided.[6] Policy with regard to displaced persons was characterized by the creation of new organisations and regulations as new needs and problems emerged or when these services were transferred to a different department or ministry.

While all displaced persons had been forced to abandon their homes due to the circumstances of the war, the government differentiated between "evacuees" and "refugees" in order to determine the degree to which they were the responsibility of the administration. The difference was that it was directly responsible for refugees, who lacked sufficient resources to cover travel costs and sustenance once they had reached their destinations, whereas it was understood that evacuees could pay for their own travel and living expenses or had relatives in their destinations who could provide for them. Family support networks were therefore essential for many displaced persons who were classified as evacuees but lacked the means to survive on their own. The distinction between refugees and evacuees also determined where displaced persons ended up. Voluntary evacuees, who paid their own way, could choose a destination, whereas refugees were not given a choice.[7]

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6 Clavijo Ledesma, *La política*, pp. 216-222.

7 Juan Carlos Collado Jiménez, *Los evacuadosde la Guerra Civil de la provincia de Toledo (1936-1939),* Madrid: Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, 2015, p.169.

The situation in Madrid, overcrowded following the arrival of numerous groups of displaced persons in the summer of 1936, primarily from Extremadura, Andalusia, and Castile, meant that evacuation plans largely centred on Madrid, though they also occurred throughout the Republican rear-guard. The problem steadily worsened as the amount of available habitable space decreased, both in the Republican zone as a whole and within cities themselves.

In general, evacuations motivated by advancing frontlines were more abrupt, while the evacuation of displaced persons from overcrowded areas was more sustained over time. Given that the largest number of evacuations departed from Madrid, the case of the Spanish capital serves as an example that allows the phenomenon to be better understood as a whole. The first step was to register at the offices responsible for those who were to be evacuated. These people would again be registered once they reached their destination. Convoys of lorries and buses were organized to transport people to the principal railway stations from which trains would depart[8] – in the case of Madrid, bound primarily for the cities of the eastern Mediterranean coast, though some evacuations to areas of the Republican rear-guard closer to the capital, in what is now Castilla-La Mancha, were also carried out. Evacuations made use of the existing rail and road networks. Special safe-conducts were required in order to take part in group evacuations, as well as for travel in general. The conditions in which people were evacuated left much to be desired, particularly early on, with overcrowding and insufficient assistance during the journey. Valencia was the principal destination for evacuations from Madrid, and from there further transfers were organized, particularly to Barcelona, generally by train. After a few days in temporary accommodation, those who did not stay in Barcelona embarked on journeys to nearby locations or further inland in Catalonia. As for displaced persons from the northern regions of the Basque Country, Asturias, and Santander, many used France as a bridge to reach Catalonia, arriving primarily by train.

Not all evacuations involved moving people from one end of the Republican zone to the other. Some were carried out on a smaller scale. In cities, the need quickly arose to evacuate buildings or even entire neighbourhoods in order to house militias or due to bombings or the proximity of the frontlines. The most vulnerable groups were always given priority for evacuation, with special attention to children, the elderly, pregnant women, and the injured. Even in places like Madrid, the largest number of movements coincided with the proximity of the threat of occupation. In short, evacuations did not take place at a steady rhythm over time, but rather intensified when there were fears that the capital

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8 Several of these convoys transported the refugees straight to the host regions.

might be taken. The greater emphasis placed on evacuating Madrid in comparison with other areas clearly shows the limitations of the institutions established to organize evacuations. What occurred in Málaga is a clear example of the lack of equal attention to other areas. As has already been mentioned, no evacuation was planned in Málaga, despite the imminent threat posed by the advancing rebel army, forcing inhabitants to flee the city in desperate circumstances.

When the insurgents' plans to take Madrid were thwarted, the number of evacuations fell because people were reluctant to leave a place which they felt was safe to embark on a new exodus full of uncertainty. Many of those who had been evacuated tried to return to the capital because the change had not always been for the better, with some suffering considerable hardship. The government called unceasingly for people to evacuate Madrid because, although the city was not under immediate threat – and would in fact hold out until the end of the war – problems of scarcity continued to worsen. For this reason, it was decided that anyone who had arrived in Madrid on or after 19 July 1936 and who was not essential to the war effort would be required to evacuated. However, many managed to avoid leaving.

Refuge

Whether forced displacement took the form of spontaneous flight or planned evacuation, the result was a steady stream of people who were forced to leave everything behind, with no roof over their heads and, in most cases, no financial means. Cities and provincial capitals in the rear-guard attracted the largest number of displaced persons because they were located along major transport routes, were better able to accommodate and assist displaced persons than smaller towns, and were seen as being safer and providing better protection, in addition to factors specific to particular cities, such as good weather. This observation does not contradict what has previously been stated: those forced to make a hasty escape tended to first seek refuge in areas near their towns, which had been occupied by the insurgents, and then undertake longer journeys to more distant locations that attracted large numbers of displaced persons.

A wide variety of places were used as shelters. In large cities like Madrid and Barcelona, the number of refugees was greater than the maximum capacity of the places set up to accommodate them. At first, refugees were housed in flats and buildings that had been seized, while cinemas, theatres, and hotels were readied for this purpose. The idea was to make use of existing buildings, repurposing all manner of spaces. However, this proved

insufficient to house the enormous number of arrivals, who were forced to seek shelter elsewhere, in the metro, in public spaces – from large squares to parks – or wherever they could improvise a place to sleep.[9] This problem also led to the growth of slums, which had been present for years in a number of growing cities.

Those who were evacuated were housed in provisional shelters – temporary accommodation, generally with room for a large number of people, where refugees stayed while awaiting relocation to their final destinations. They were then sent to new accommodations in the same city or to nearby towns that could take people in, thus reducing overcrowding in the principal points of arrival. The use of bullfighting rings, theatres, stations, and even former religious buildings has been documented. For instance, in Barcelona, the Montjuïc stadium and buildings that remained from the 1929 International Exposition were used as shelters. These spaces were also where the displaced underwent medical check-ups and were given basic toiletries, clothing, and shoes, whenever possible.

The vast majority of the displaced were not able to stay in one place for the remainder of the war after fleeing their homes. It is therefore useful to speak in terms of an exodus or a lengthy journey characterized by constant change. After the initial displacement, many were forced to move on to safer areas multiple times as the frontlines drew nearer, leaving one place of refuge or city for another. Furthermore, as the war set in and the frequency of air raids increased, it was common for people to flee cities and major towns in the rear-guard.

The constant stream of people arriving in certain places immediately led to difficulties in attending to the needs of these displaced persons and in the provision of supplies. It must be noted that, in addition to civilians fleeing occupied territory, some cities saw their populations increase due to the arrival of militias, members of the International Brigades, and humanitarian workers, among other groups. The concentration of such a large number of people in these cities created a constant need to reduce population density in order to alleviate problems of scarcity of space and provisions.

Groups of refugees were distributed among smaller cities and towns in the rear-guard to reduce overcrowding in places of shelter located in major cities. Municipal governments played a key role in attending to the needs of refugees, serving as intermediaries with central and provincial organisations and taking on the task of facilitating family-based arrangements for many refugees. When relocating refugees, an attempt was made at all times to keep relatives or people from the same place together. This had the advantage of

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9 For a more detailed description of the situation in Madrid, see: Juan Carlos Collado Jiménez, *Los evacuados de la Guerra Civil de la provincia de Toledo (1936-1939)*, Madrid: Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, 2015. For Barcelona: Joan Serrallonga i Urquidi, *Refugiats i desplaçats dins la Catalunya en guerra, 1936-1939*, Barcelona: Editorial Base, 2004.

helping to better control the refugee population, averting individual attempts to travel in search of family members. Both during evacuation and after arrival, special attention was paid to children who were cared for in children's camps, housed either by local families or in group facilities. In these safe locations, far from the frontlines, girls and boys up to 12 years of age were given housing, food, care, and schooling.[10] The aim was above all to avoid young children being sent to other countries. However, because the ultimate priority was to keep them safe, some children were sent abroad over the course of the war, to destinations including Mexico, England, and the Soviet Union.

The needs to be met were not exactly few in number. The provision of necessities is always difficult in times of war, but in this case the war was a civil conflict that had left Spain's territory divided, making numerous agricultural areas inaccessible. These circumstances made it difficult to feed the population of the areas that had remained loyal to the Republic. Further complicating matters was the growth of this population as hundreds and sometimes thousands of people arrived daily, fleeing occupied areas. These displaced persons increasingly arrived in destitute circumstances. This situation created problems of scarcity and, on numerous occasions, led to tensions surrounding access to resources.

From the first weeks of the war, efforts were made at various levels to tackle needs that were becoming increasingly apparent. In this situation, humanitarian organisations played a key role in assisting displaced persons. Material assistance and humanitarian workers were provided by organisations from Spain and numerous other countries, the most important being Swiss and Belgian aid organisations and British and American Quaker groups, though help arrived from all over the world.[11] Some of these organisations had experience providing humanitarian aid during earlier conflicts, while others were created in response to the events in Spain. All of them worked alongside political and trade union organisations whenever their help was needed, setting up canteens, hospitals, clothing banks, and children's camps, among other activities. While many of these projects had limited resources and had to be shut down, new ones emerged throughout the three years that the war lasted. Furthermore, Spanish organisations worked constantly to encourage the local population to contribute to relief efforts, holding charitable events to collect donations, clothing, and toys for children. Once again, children were the principal recipients

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10 On children's camps, see; Juan Manuel Fernández Soria, "La asistencia a la infancia en la Guerra Civil. Las colonias escolares", *Revista Interuniversitaria* 6 (1987), pp. 83-128.

11 Petrus, *La ayuda humanitaria*. For an example of Quaker assistance during the war, see: Xavier García Ferrandis, and Àlvar Martínez-Vidal, "La ayuda humanitaria de los British Quakers durante la Guerra Civil española (1936-1939): el caso del Hospital Infantil de Polop de la Marina (Alicante)", *Ascelpio* 71/1 (2019), http://asclepio.revistas.csic.es/index.php/asclepio/article/view/810.

of this aid – refugees, orphans, and other children in need, without distinction. After the Republican side was defeated, some of these organisations continued to provide aid in exile.

As the months went by, the hardships caused by the difficulties in securing supplies and the rationing system became widespread. Furthermore, people were fearful and on constant alert due to the proliferation of disease. The risk of epidemics remained high throughout the war because of deficient sanitation and nutrition. For this reason, soap became one of the most prized articles among donated supplies. Conditions both during the journey and after arrival were not always the best. Overcrowding, poor sanitation, food shortages, and inclement weather faced by people who lacked suitable winter clothing were among the factors behind the high mortality rate among refugees. While exact numbers are not currently available, it is known that child mortality was particularly high. Most of the dead were small children who perished due to malnutrition or infectious diseases. The harsh conditions and overcrowding in many places of refugees contributed to the spread of disease. Indeed, in addition to the risk of infectious disease, many refugees developed conditions caused by malnutrition, such as rickets and pellagra. Such diseases are characteristic of situations of extreme deprivation like those experienced by refugees during the Spanish Civil War, who were forced to subsist on a highly unbalanced and nutrient-poor diet.

As the war continued, a problem that in the first months had been thought to be temporary became entrenched. Those who had fled their homes believing that they would only be away for a few weeks realized that would not be the case. The fear of looting and losing their homes and possessions forever even led some people to return secretly to occupied areas or towns located perilously close to the frontlines, despite the risk to their lives. The insurgents' advances continued to shrink the Republican rear-guard zone, causing new refugee movements from regions that had been seen as safe, but which during the final year of the war began to receive increasing numbers of refugees from local provinces, as in the case of Catalonia.[12]

The end of the war

The victory of Franco's insurgents in the war resulted in constant repression against the defeated. The future of those who had been forced to abandon their homes after the war was generally conditioned by this repression, as the mere fact of having fled was questioned by the new regime. Many were forced to embark on a new exodus, this time leaving

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12 Serrallonga i Urquidi, *Refugiats i desplaçats*.

for exile – most commonly to France, but in some cases to Algeria or Latin America. Most exiles ended up in French concentration camps in dreadful conditions, and some had the misfortune of being sent to the front when war broke out a few months later or being deported to Nazi concentration camps like Mauthausen. Those who, conversely, embarked on a different sort of exodus, returning to their homes, did not always fare better. Calls were immediately made for people to return home. The conditions in which they returned were often even more difficult than when they had fled. They felt like strangers in what had been their homes. Many of those who had fled during the war were denounced before the new authorities or faced stigma that marked them for life. They were subject to purges, sentenced to prison and, in some cases, killed. Some chose to go into hiding until they believed they could safely be seen in public. The most fortunate, while experiencing the tragedy of having to leave behind the lives they had led before the conflict, were able to avoid following orders to return to their places of origin and begin a new life in the places where they had found refuge, though this was not easy due to the conditions of extreme deprivation that characterized the post-war period. Experiences like the Spanish Civil War highlight the importance of looking to the past to examine forced displacement today in historical perspective. This perspective can help us respond to similar problems, serving to remind us that such circumstances can arise anywhere in the world and must be properly addressed.